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Kentucky Negro Education Association (NKEA) Journal: Accounting of Librarians and Libraries

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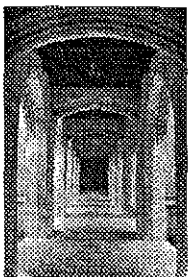
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KENTUCKY NEGRO EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (KNEA) JOURNAL: ACCOUNTING OF LIBRARIANS AND LIBRARIES

BY REINETTE F. JONES

UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY COMMUNICATIONS LIBRARIAN



The Librarians Conference was the 15th division to be established under the Kentucky Negro Education Association (KNEA). It was the first formal organization of Kentucky Negro librarians. Annual proceedings of all conferences and departments were published in the KNEA Journal. Around 1960 KNEA and its journal became defunct. To date, the KNEA Journal seems to be the only source that gives an accounting of the Librarians Conference activity. The most complete holding of the Journal is available at the Kentucky State University Blazer Library Archives. Microfilm copies of issues are also available at the New York Public Library.

Prior to the Librarians Conference, the KNEA Journal contained advertisements such as the following from the 1924 proceedings issue.

"Be a progressive teacher. Plan to attend the K.N.E.A. Meeting April 22-25, 1925. See that your library contains an up-to-date set of *reference books*. Have a school library. (Donated by a Friend)"

By 1930 the journal also contained articles about Negro libraries and librarians. This was in part due to the increased number of Negro librarians who were graduates of the first Negro library school in the South, Hampton Institute. One such graduate was Ms. Emma B. Lewis, the first trained librarian at Kentucky State Industrial College (KSIC). Lewis was the first to publish an article about a library in the KNEA Journal. In the December 1930 issue of the Journal, Lewis tells of the progress of the KSIC library. In the same issue there is mention of Lewis' educational background, and within the editors advice section, teachers are advised to "teach the use of books and libraries."

Funding was now available for school libraries through the Julius Rosenwald Fund (J.R.F.). The February 1931 KNEA Journal boasted

that besides Kentucky, only two other states had as many school libraries aided by the Rosenwald Fund. Rosenwald was president of Sears, Roebuck and Company, he was a Northern philanthropist interested in Negroes in the Rural South (Jarrett, 1975). According to the Journal, the Rosenwald Fund provided liberal aid "on libraries, school buses, transportation, home economics equipment, shop equipment, and on consolidated school buildings." "A library is a necessity in any kind of school... The books have been selected by the world's best library authorities." Eighty Rosenwald Libraries had been placed in 50 counties, which left 70 counties without the prescribed collections of books that included titles by and about Negroes. Negro educators were encouraged to write L. N. Taylor at the Kentucky State Department of Education for information on how to take advantage of the Rosenwald Fund.

About the same time that Negro school libraries were receiving new books, the Louisville Municipal College for Negroes opened its first session as a four year senior college. An article about the College opening and its four new faculty members appeared in the 1931 October-November journal issue. One of the new members was Ms. Eliza V. Atkins, assistant librarian who had received her B. S. in library science from the University of Illinois. Atkins would go on to become the first Negro to receive a Ph.D. in librarianship and become head librarian at the Louisville Municipal College, later she would become the first dean of the Negro library school at Atlanta University (Jones, 1970).

Things were looking up for Negro librarians and Negro school libraries. Both the Louisville Municipal College for Negroes and the Kentucky State Industrial College now had college trained librarians. The Rosenwald Fund was aiding Negro schools in purchasing

new library books. The KNEA Journal kept subscribers abreast of the changing times. However, there was one occurrence the journal failed to mention, Thomas Fountain Blue's library training program at the Louisville Free Public Library ended in the mist of all the new changes. As far as the KNEA Journal was concerned, the Rosenwald Fund was the center focus.

January 1932 the Journal gave an accounting of the school libraries aided by the Rosenwald Fund during the 1930-1931 fiscal year. The cost of the books ranged from \$84.65 up to \$300.00. The Fund provided one-third of the cost of elementary libraries that cost \$90 or more, and high school libraries that cost \$120 or more. The aid also covered freight cost. Applications for the libraries had to be approved by the State Department of Education before the books were bought. Educators were reminded that library service was an essential part of a school.

On the proceeding page of the Rosenwald Fund accounting is a poem by Mary F. Dixon of the Bond-Washington High School in Elizabethtown, KY. The poem is titled "My Books and I." Dixon ends her poem by vowing to love her books "till the end."

In the October-November 1932 journal issue, L. N. Taylor reported that Ms. Lena B. Nofcier and Ms. Mary McNeely, of the Kentucky Library Commission, visited 16 of the Negro schools that had received Rosenwald Libraries. The Kentucky Library Commission had been created by the legislature in 1910 at the request of the Federation of Women's Clubs (Kleber, 1992). The Federation and Berea College had created a traveling library project in 1896 (Kleber, 1992). The project provided library service to those who lived in the mountains.

In 1932 the Kentucky Library Commission was evaluating the J.R.F. libraries. According to L. N. Taylor's article, Nofcier and McNeely reported that most of the libraries were in good condition. Teachers served as librarians and the books were loaned to the community. Loaning books to the community was suggested as a future provision. It was also suggested that there be a teacher-librarian in charge of the library service and it would also be helpful to have a student librarian. One cent a day was a safe rule for overdue books. The books were to be classified by elementary and high school subjects, and students should be

expected to read 5 or more books. Students could read books below their grade level, but students were not to read books above their grade level.

Negro schools were continuously encouraged to make use of the Rosenwald Fund and to observe Rosenwald Day by planning school activities. The schools were to report the activities to L. N. Taylor. The lack of reports caused Taylor to vent his frustration in the 1932 Journal issue. "Why can't most of our schools observe Rosenwald Day? Probably they did. Why did they not report it? They do in other states. Why do sixty percent of our schools have no trees and shrubs to make the school grounds attractive? The teacher and students can make school life better by making the school room and the school grounds attractive." Over the next five years articles would continue to appear in the KNEA Journal encouraging schools to take advantage of the Rosenwald Fund.

At the end of 1935 the first KNEA Librarians Conference was held at Central High School in Louisville, Kentucky. This was the first formal gathering of Kentucky Negro Librarians. A similar gathering had taken place on the national level when Thomas Fountain Blue helped found the Negro Library Conference in 1927. One of the goals of Blue's Conference was "to begin a more active participation in the American Library Association" (Wright, 1955). Blue was an associate of Virginia Lacy Jones, librarian at the Louisville Municipal College for Negroes. Jones and Ann Rucker Anderson, librarian at Kentucky State College, had organized the KNEA Librarians Conference (Jones, 1970).

Minutes of the Conference were recorded in the 1935 October-November issue of the KNEA Journal. There were 12 librarians in attendance. Ruth Theobald, supervisor of Public School Libraries in Kentucky, was principal speaker. Earlier in the year, Theobald's office had made it mandatory for high school librarians to have formal training (General Education, 1937). Theobald outlined several problems confronting librarians. After Theobald's presentation, Rucker was elected as chairman of the Librarians Conference. Elizabeth Johnson, librarian of the Central High School, was elected secretary. Rucker appointed a committee to develop a questionnaire to survey Negro libraries in Kentucky. Members of the survey committee were Virginia Lacy, Rachel Harris of the Louisville

Free Public Library Colored Branch, and Mrs. K. T. Haskins of Lexington.

Starting with the first Conference, Negro librarians saw that it was their duty to dictate proper reading material to Negro children. Books were the answer to social and moral problems facing Negro children.

The second Library Conference was also held at the Central High School, in 1936. Rachel Harris gave an address on "how we could get our adolescents to reading books they should be reading during their leisure." Ruth Theobald was again a guest at the Conference. Theobald spoke of the need for librarians to have professional training in order to "put over" the school library program. There was also a discussion of the three main problems confronting librarians – "acquiring of books, teaching a course in the use of books and libraries to high school and college students, and getting students to read the right books." At the conclusion of the meeting, Rucker and Johnson were re-elected to their posts. A round table discussion followed the meeting. Those in attendance decided that a letter should be written to the H. W. Wilson Company to ask that the Crisis and Opportunity be indexed in the Reader's Guide. Both the Crisis and Opportunity were publications of the NAACP.

The following issue of the Journal, January-February 1937, once again focused on the Julius Rosenwald Fund. S. L. Smith, Director for the Southern Office of the Rosenwald Fund, was pictured on the front of the Journal. Inside was a picture of "The Late Julius Rosenwald" and a letter from Smith asking L. N. Taylor to encourage schools to purchase one of the few (100) pictures of Rosenwald for \$2.50. "The benevolence that shows in the face of Mr. Rosenwald will grace any library room in which this picture may be placed. Orders for this picture may be made through this office." Smith's letter was dated January 6, 1936, approximately one year before the letter appeared in the journal.

In the same journal issue are articles stressing the importance of books for children to read and there is further explanation of the Rosenwald Fund generosity. There is also a listing of book titles that have been "carefully selected by officers of the Julius Rosenwald Fund in consultation with librarians and educators for distribution to both white and colored high schools." The list contains titles

such as God's Trombones, Souls of Black Folk, Cinderella, Little Black Sambo, and Science Stories.

In 1937 the Librarians Conference met for the third time. According to the KNEA Official Program, the meeting was held at the Western Colored Branch Library in Louisville, Kentucky. Virginia Lacy of the Louisville Municipal College spoke on "Problems and Suggestions for Improvement of the Teacher-Librarians in Kentucky." It was now a state requirement for schools to have an adequate library and there was a need to sell the idea of the need of a library to the community. Following Lacy's address, Hortense Young of the Louisville Municipal College was elected chairman and Elizabeth Johnson remained secretary for a third term. Twenty-two librarians and teacher-librarians had attended the Conference, all of whom were women.

The 1938 proceedings in the October-November journal issue was much more brief than previous minutes; there were two paragraphs. The Conference was held at the Central High School in Louisville. Florence Curtis, Director of the Hampton Library School was guest speaker. Curtis talked of problems confronting Kentucky librarians and librarians elsewhere. She gave suggestions for improving this phase of education in Kentucky.

Proceedings of the 1939 Librarians Conference were published in greater detail than those of the previous year. The proceedings appeared in the October-November journal issue, dutifully submitted by Elizabeth Mundy, secretary. Mr. P. L. Gutherie, principal of the Dunbar High School in Lexington, Kentucky, spoke about "The Relationship of the High School Principal to His Library." Ann Rucker mentioned that principals should urge their librarians to "avail" themselves of the information found in the free Kentucky educational bulletins. Virginia Lacy strongly pointed out that "children develop desirable character traits through vicariously reading and by assuming their social responsibility in sharing library facilities with school mates." Naomi Lattimore, assistant librarian at the Louisville Free Public Library Colored Branch, gave reasons why "Negroes have inferiority complexes and outlined a method of attack from the librarian's point of view in an attempt to eradicate this complex through the library's facilities." Hortense Young, Conference Chairman, spoke of her efforts to have a Negro appointed to the

Board of Certification for Librarians that had been set up by the Governor. The matter had been referred by Harold Brigham, Librarian of the Louisville Free Public Library, and to Lena Nofcier, Secretary of the Library Extension Division. At the conclusion of the meeting Virginia Lacy was re-elected as chairman and Naomi Lattimore was elected secretary.

After the 1939 Conference, the KNEA Journal did not publish detail accounts of the annual proceedings. The proceedings became skimpier and skimpier and finally disappeared. There was also less coverage of librarians and libraries in general.

The 1940 October-November journal issue contained one paragraph per conference or department. For the Librarians Conference, Naomi Lattimore had become chairman. The general theme of the Conference was "The Library and the Child." In the 1941 January-February issue of the journal it was mentioned that Alroma Ford Nichols, a teacher in the State Street High School in Bowling Green, Kentucky, had completed her Master of Education Degree at the University of Cincinnati. Nichols thesis was titled "A Study of the Libraries in the Class A Schools in Kentucky."

The next supposed library article appeared in the 1946 February-March journal issue. The article was written by Helen Anthony Kean, Teacher of the Sight-Saving Class at Madison Street Junior High School in Louisville, Kentucky. The article was titled "The Library in the Rehabilitation of the handicapped." Kean's article never mentioned anything about libraries; the article was about returning soldiers who were now handicapped due to war injuries.

Starting in 1947 the KNEA Journal only listed the name of the conference or department chairman and an itinerary of each meeting. This format continued until the journal ceased publication around 1960.

In 1950 an article appeared in the February journal issue. The article was written by Mary

Mace Spradling, temporary chairman of the Librarians' Section. Spradling's article addressed the poor conditions of school libraries and the lack of support for librarians. The article concluded with the plea for more librarians to attend the Librarian's Section meetings.

An article by Ruth Hill Jones appeared in the March 1952 journal issue. Jones was the librarian at Madison Junior High in Louisville, Kentucky. Jones' article spoke to the balanced reading diet that was the main support of mental health. The article went on to give book reviews of titles that included, Feelings of Being Negro in America, The Education of Man: Aphorisms, and Dilemma of the Teacher.

In 1953 KNEA became Kentucky Negro Teachers' Association (K.T.A.) and membership was open to all regardless of race. An account of the constitutional change was published in the October-November issue of the newly named KTA Journal. Also within the issue was a note that Helen N. McCoy was the first Negro to receive a Bachelor of Library Science degree from the Nazareth College in Louisville, Kentucky. The note was corrected in a 1954 journal issue; McCoy received a Master of Library Science degree and she was the first person of any race to receive such a degree from Nazareth.

The 1955 February-March issue of the KTA Journal noted that the Student Library Assistants of Kentucky (SLAK) would hold its annual meeting at Kentucky State College. This was the only mention of SLAK in the KTA or the KNEA Journal. The meeting was to provide an opportunity for student library assistants to discuss problems. The conference was open to all SLAK, regardless of race.

Desegregation had arrived. The 1956 March-April journal issue explained the plan for a proposed merger of the Kentucky Teachers' Association and the Kentucky Education Association. The Negro Librarians Conference and all other conferences and departments were being swept away in the tide of progress.

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